



CAPITOL UPDATE

OFFICE OF STATE REPRESENTATIVE
Penny Bernard Schaber

Serving the heart of Appleton



Penny's Column for Sunshine Week:

"Sunshine is the best disinfectant," Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis famously remarked early in the 20th Century, referring to the need for transparency, openness, and citizen oversight to prevent corruption. It is in honor of those values that we celebrate Sunshine Week this week, and such a reminder could not be more timely. I have never seen these values under such threat as they have been during the Legislature's month-long debate over Gov. Walker's budget repair bill.

Over the last month, the Walker administration and the Republican leadership in the Legislature took a number of steps to limit Wisconsin citizens' ability to get in touch with their elected representatives. When Gov. Walker released his budget repair proposal, the response from constituents was overwhelming. For the first week, my office received dozens of calls a day. After a few days, however, I noticed the number of calls had suddenly dropped to just a handful. It was not until it was reported in the media that I discovered the reason: the Republican leadership had deactivated the state's legislative hotline. When the people's interest in their government was at an all-time high, Republicans were erecting barriers to hide behind. I am still receiving contacts, over 1700 opposed and 340 in favor, which is not including the multiple contacts from individuals or households.

By far the most egregious violation of both the spirit and the letter of the law was the Walker Administration's order to close the Capitol to the public. On February 28, after two weeks of peaceful demonstrations, the administration increased security to unprecedented levels. Where before anyone could walk into the Capitol and visit their representative's office at any time, under the new restrictions, each legislator was only allowed to meet with eight constituents at a time. Constituents who had a meeting had to be escorted by police from the door of the Capitol to the representative's office, and then back outside after the meeting. If a constituent needed to use the bathroom during their visit, they were required to be escorted by a police officer or legislative staffer. Even members of the Legislature were blocked from the building. In fact, the morning the Assembly was scheduled to vote on the Budget Repair Bill, several representatives were locked out and had to crawl through windows to make it to the Assembly chambers on time.

This level of security might be warranted if the Capitol faced an extraordinary security threat, but that was not the case here. Security was tighter during the Budget Repair debate than that it was in the immediate aftermath of the Tucson shooting, when Wisconsin elected officials received death threats. Even September 11 did not provoke such extreme security.

I sincerely hope that these recent events are not a sign of what's to come and that Gov. Walker and the Republican leadership in the Assembly will return to upholding our state's strong commitment to open government and citizen involvement as we debate the state's two-year budget. If this is the level of transparency that we can expect from the Republicans for a 138-page bill, I am concerned to think of what the future holds for the 1,345-page state budget bill.

Whether you support or oppose the proposals being passed in Madison, we all benefit from an open and honest government. I encourage Attorney General Van Hollen to stand by his recent comments and ensure that our government officials follow the letter and the spirit of our open meeting laws. Public meetings and open government are not just a formality to be sidestepped when they are inconvenient. They are the basis of our free and open democracy, and we should all work to encourage efforts that will shine light on our government and improve public access to our democratic process.

2011-2013 Budget Information:

This is a link to the WI Department of Administration Division of Executive Budget & Finance. Documents that have been released about the currently introduced Budget can be found here:

<http://www.doa.state.wi.us/debf/execbudget.asp?locid=3>

On March 1st Governor Walker submitted his wish list, or "executive budget", all 1345 pages of it, to the Legislature. The Joint Finance Committee (JFC), made up of 2 Assembly Democrats, 6 Assembly Republicans, 2 Senate Democrats and 6 Senate Republicans, gets the first opportunity at amending the document.

The budget process is lengthy and complicated. JFC committee members traditionally hold agency briefings in Madison for about two weeks. This is when agencies come before JFC and present on what the Budget document will mean for them. After the agency briefings, JFC members can hold committee hearings around the state for two weeks. There are usually 6 locations and the public is welcome to come and provide testimony on the Budget Bill. None of these meetings have been scheduled so the timeline is not yet set.

After the hearings JFC begins voting on budget provisions and will eventually submit a revised budget to the Senate or Assembly, which will in turn pass it along to the other house after passage. If the past is any guide, in the end a final budget will likely be crafted by a conference committee made up of an equal number of Assembly Republicans and Senate Republicans. Both houses will vote on the Conference Committee Report and send it to the Governor, who can unilaterally make even more changes.

All of this is supposed to be completed by the end of June, which is the end of the current budget. There will be a lot of information coming out in the next few weeks so please stay in contact with my office and I will do my best to get you the information that you need. You are also welcome to attend my listening sessions scheduled for March and April.

Listening Sessions for the 2011-2013 Budget Bill:

I just wanted to let you know that I will be holding two listening session in Appleton on Monday March 28th and Monday April 25th. Both will be from 6:00-8:00pm and will be held at the Appleton Public Library.

Your input is very important and specific suggestions are welcome! I will be available to anyone that wants to talk to me concerning the 2011-2013 Budget. Please stop by and share with me your suggestions, thoughts and concerns about any legislation.

Monday March 28th

6:00-8:00pm

Meeting Room C

Monday April 25th

6:00-8:00pm

Meeting Room A/B/C

Appleton Public Library

225 N. Oneida Street, Appleton, WI 54911-4780

<http://www.apl.org/>

Question of the Month:

What are your specific suggestions for raising revenue or cutting spending at the state level?

Make sure to send in your response to rep.bernardschaber@legis.wi.gov or to my office at PO Box 8953 Madison, WI 53708. I will make sure to take any input I receive into consideration during my next term.

Penny's Pointer:

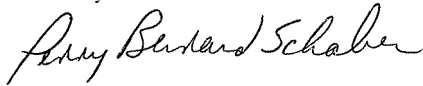
As we watch the devastation unfold in Japan from the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, most of us are asking ourselves, "How can I help?" Unfortunately, there are also those among us who are asking themselves, "How can I profit?", and it can be hard sometimes to sort out legitimate solicitations for help from scams. The Wisconsin Bureau of Consumer Protection offers these tips to avoid phony charitable solicitations:

- Donate to established, reputable organizations, such as the [American Red Cross](#), [UNICEF](#), [Doctors Without Borders](#), or other charitable organizations you know and trust.
- Be suspicious of brand new, unknown organizations, along with those with names that are similar – but not identical – to established organizations.
- Be cautious when making an online donation. Most legitimate charity websites end in "dot-org" rather than "dot-com". Also, use sites with a URL address that begins with "https" – the "s" stands for secure. Only make a credit card transaction when you initiate the contact and know you are using a legitimate site.
- Never feel pressured into making a donation. Legitimate charities will give you time to consider your options and do not expect an immediate donation.
- If you are uncertain about a charity, check it out with the Better Business Bureau (1-800-273-1002) or www.give.org. Other helpful resources include www.guidestar.org or www.charitynavigator.org. Always find out what percentage of your donation is going directly toward relief efforts and what portion is used for administrative costs, etc.
- Under Wisconsin law, most organizations soliciting for charitable donations must register and file an annual report with the Department of Regulation and Licensing (608-266-5511). Religious and veteran organizations are exempt from registration.

Events:

Do you have an event you would like me to attend in Appleton? If so, please contact my office at 608-266-3070 or email rep.bernardschaber@legis.wi.gov.

Thank you!!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Penny Bernard Schaber".

Rep. Penny Bernard Schaber

57th Assembly District

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